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AN ADDRESS

ON

The Character and Services

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OF

DE WITT CLINTON,

DELIVERED AT NASHVILLE, MARCH 11, 1828,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE

Grand Chapter of Tennessee.

BY WILLIAM GIBBES HUNT,

GENERAL GRAND MARSHAL OF THE GENERAL GRAND CHAPTER OF THE UNITED STATES,
AND GRAND HIGH PRIEST OF THE GRAND CHAPTER OF TENNESSEE.

NASHVILLE:

PRINTED BY JOHN S. SIMPSON,
1828.



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GRAND ROYAL ARCH CHAPTER OF TENNESSEE.

At a special meeting, held at the Masonic Hall, in Nashville, on Monday evening, March 10th, 1828, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted, viz.

Resolved, That the members of this Grand Chapter, individually, and collectively, sympathise with the masonic fraternity throughout the union, in the universal grief for the loss of that pride and ornament of the craft, the M. E. DE WITT CLINTON, General Grand High Priest of the General Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the United States.

Resolved, That the members of this Grand Chapter wear masonic mourning for the term of one month, in testimony of their respect for the memory of the illustrious deceased.

Resolved, That it be recommended to the subordinate chapters under this jurisdiction, to manifest a similar testimonial of respect.

Resolved, That a public tribute be paid to the memory of the deceased agreeably to the arrangements suggested by the committee appointed for that purpose.

The following, offered by Companion Dillahunty, was unanimously adopted.

WHEREAS the death of the Most Excellent Grand King, EDWARD H. STEELE, has been made known to this Grand Chapter, and the members thereof knowing his worth as a man and a mason, and feeling the deepest, and most heart-felt sorrow for his loss—therefore, as a manifestation of respect for the memory of the deceased,

Resolved, That the members of this Grand Chapter wear crape on their left arm for the space of thirty days.

Resolved, That the members of the subordinate chapters, in this state, be requested to do the same.



At an adjourned meeting, held as above, on Tuesday evening, March 11th, 1828, the following preamble and resolutions, offered by companion Dillahunty, were unanimously adopted.

The members of this Grand Chapter, having listened with great satisfaction to the excellent address delivered by the M. E. Grand High Priest Wm. G. HUNT, in pursuance of a request of this Grand Chapter, on the character and services of our illustrious companion, DE WITT CLINTON, M. E. Grand High Priest of the United States: Therefore,

Resolved, That he be requested to furnish to the Grand Secretary of this Grand Chapter a copy of the same for publication.

Resolved further, That he is entitled to the thanks of this Grand Chapter for the able manner in which he discharged the duties imposed upon him in this behalf.

CHARLES COOPER, *Grand Secretary*.



ADDRESS.

COMPANIONS AND BRETHREN,

It is among the happiest tendencies of the venerable order to which we are attached, to teach us the value of departed worth, and to inspire us with a suitable veneration for the illustrious dead. The primary objects of Masonry are, indeed, to smooth the rugged road of life, to remove the asperities of the human character, and to increase, at once, the usefulness and happiness of man. But these objects are sought through the influence of example as well as of precept, and no where is example so powerfully efficacious as in the recollection and the history of those who are gone. It is not till the whole career of life is run, that the character can be considered as unalterably fixed, or its real merits can be fairly appreciated. It is not till the grave has closed over its victim, and buried forever, with his mouldering remains, the jealousies, and rivalships, and petty hostilities, by which all are surrounded while living, that impartial justice can be done to the most illustrious benefactor of mankind. It is not till the immortal spirits of the

good and great have taken their upward flight to the scenes of their ultimate triumph and reward, that the brilliancy of their course on earth can be clearly discerned, and the clouds which had obscured the full-orbed splendor of their fame can be thoroughly and finally dispersed.

Masonry, it is true, teaches us to regard all mankind as upon a level, and claims, for all, the enjoyment of equal rights and privileges. She respects not the accidental or arbitrary distinctions of wealth or rank, but looks at personal merit only, and very properly inculcates the lesson "that he who faithfully performs his duty, even in a subordinate or private station, is as justly entitled to esteem and respect, as he who is invested with supreme authority." Her favorite and most appropriate sphere of operation is indeed in the retired circle, in the cultivation of the social affections, the encouragement of domestic virtues and the promotion of individual happiness. The humblest citizen, who, by his industry, frugality and cheerfulness, gives comfort and support to a dependent family, and irradiates with his virtues the contracted sphere in which he moves, is as truly an object of masonic regard, as the most exalted individual on the catalogue of fame. When the obscure, but amiable and useful parent, relative or friend is taken away from the little circle by which he was respected and beloved, Masonry drops the sympathetic tear and tenders the balm of consolation, with as much sincerity and ardor, as when called to lament the loss of the

most illustrious benefactor of our race. Yet it would be absurd to suppose, that the same degree of importance would be given to the event, in the one case, as in the other. It is in the power of us all to be upright and virtuous citizens, and to secure the affections of our neighbors and friends; but it is the lot only of a favored few, to be able to shed a lustre on the age in which they live, to be known and esteemed throughout the habitable globe, and eminently to contribute, by their talents and services, to the improvement of the general condition of man. Unfortunately too, those brilliant and rarely gifted minds, designed and calculated to enlighten and to bless, are sometimes perverted to purposes of mischief and employed as instruments to blight and destroy. The same orb of day, which imparts a genial warmth, and by its temperate influence vivifies and sustains, inflicts also a mortal blow—parches and consumes. The same wind, which wafts the vessel on its way, and impels it rapidly towards its destined port, sometimes impedes its progress, excites the turbulence of the waves, and drives it onward to inevitable destruction. So likewise the same intellectual powers, which, rightly employed, might add to the dignity and welfare of man, when unattended by moral principle, exercise a baleful and pernicious influence. Amidst therefore the whirlwinds of passion, the conflicting elements of pride and ambition, and the raging billows of faction and of war, how seldom can we discern those towering and brilliant minds, upon which the eye of the

patriot and philanthropist may repose with unmingled delight! Thinly scattered at remote distances throughout the range of the mental vision, they appear

“ Like specks of azure in a clouded sky,
Like sunny islands in a stormy sea.”

No wonder then, that when these master-spirits of the age are taken from the sphere of their influence and cut off in the midst of their usefulness, the shock is felt and the loss deplored—not by a family circle only—not by the inhabitants of a village or a city—but by a nation and by the world. On such occasions surely, Masonry cannot fail to participate in the general sorrow, nor can she be backward in the exercise of those sympathies, which are always ready for the consolation of the afflicted. Sometimes too, as at present, Masonry herself is directly concerned, being called to mourn the loss of her own distinguished votaries and friends.

We are assembled to-day, companions, brethren and fellow-citizens, in obedience to the impulse of feelings alike natural and honorable, to mingle our expressions of heartfelt regret with those of the whole masonic family and of every class and description of people in this extensive republic—nay, of every friend to virtue, science, and human improvement throughout the world—for the unexpected loss of one who was not only the pride and ornament of our institution, but an eminent blessing to his country and to mankind. The unusual suddenness of the shock renders it the more peculiarly and painfully severe. While

our hopes, with regard to his future usefulness and fame, are yet glowing with more than ordinary brilliancy and warmth, they are, in an instant, extinguished forever. No preparatory warning precedes the fatal blow; no gathering cloud portends the approaching desolation. One moment DE WITT CLINTON stands firm and erect in the vigor of health, and the eyes of his grateful country are fixed upon him with pride, exultation, and hope. But the next moment he is gone, and the eyes of his country are suffused with tears. He is gone, and learning deplores the loss of an efficient advocate and powerful patron. He is gone, and public improvement is deprived of its most ardent and successful promoter. He is gone, and Masonry mourns for the most prominent and distinguished among her champions and friends. His family are overwhelmed with the desolating blow. His wife, rendered frantic by the shock, finds only in the wildness of delirium those hopes and consolations, which reason and truth are unable to afford. His neighbors rush forward to the spot, with breathless solicitude, to learn the extent of the calamity. A whole city is instantly electrified, and animated with a single all-absorbing interest, and the anxious throng, forgetting their individual cares and deserting their ordinary pursuits, are concerned only for the general loss. The legislature of the great state, over which he presided with such distinguished ability, and whose interests he promoted with such unrivalled success, pause in the midst of their public labors, and join the

chorus of universal lamentation. Opposing parties drop their weapons of contention and are emulous only to be foremost in expressions of respect for the memory of the deceased. The melancholy intelligence travels with unexampled rapidity, and reaches in every direction the extremities of our republic in anticipation of the ordinary channels of information. Every where it is received with the same poignant regret, and every where spontaneous and unequivocal bursts of feeling attest the severity and keenness of the loss. We too, my friends, remotely situated as we are from the place of his residence and the immediate theatre of his useful labors, have left, for a time, our business and our pleasures, and have come up together to this temple of the Most High, here to enjoy the melancholy satisfaction of expressing our sorrow, and of uniting in the contemplation of the character and services of him whom we mourn. Let us then, in pursuance of this object, take a brief and rapid survey of the eventful and valuable life of the illustrious deceased, and dwell, for a few moments, on those prominent traits, which elevated him so far above the mass of his contemporaries.

De Witt Clinton was born in Orange county, in the state of New-York, in March, 1769. His family was distinguished and highly respected. His father was a major general in the army of the revolution, and his uncle, the venerable George Clinton, filled, successively, the important offices of governor of the state of New-York and vice president of the United States.

Young De Witt received the rudiments of a classical education at Columbia College, in the city of New-York, being the first student who entered that seminary after the conclusion of the revolutionary war. Having obtained the honors of his *Alma Mater*, he entered with assiduity upon the study of the law, and, in due season, was licensed to practise that profession. Other pursuits however soon attracted his attention, and prevented him from prosecuting his original design. At an early age he was appointed secretary of his uncle, then governor of New-York, and entered, with characteristic ardor and signal ability, into the political discussions of the day. After the retirement of his uncle from the executive office, he was himself elected, without opposition, in his twentyeighth year, a member of the legislature from the city of New-York. Here he commenced that career of practical utility and steady devotion to the cause of science and benevolence, for which he was afterwards so pre-eminently distinguished. Already regarded as the leader and most efficient member of a great political party, he was not however so blinded by zeal for the interests of his friends as to lose sight of the claims of philanthropy and learning, but, by directing a large portion of his attention to these important considerations, he was the instrument of much good to others, and added greatly to his popularity and influence. In the year 1802 he was elected to the senate of the United States and was eminently distinguished as an able and efficient member of that body. For many years he oc-

cupied with signal ability and success the very important and responsible office of mayor of the great and growing city of New-York. He was afterwards again placed in the legislature of his native state, and was, as before, the zealous and powerful friend of the interests of education and benevolence, urging the patronage of schools and colleges, the incorporation of valuable societies and the support of hospitals and other charitable institutions. Here too he took the lead in behalf of that splendid and magnificent system of internal improvement, the success of which,—mainly attributable to his indefatigable and well directed exertions,—has so largely contributed to the prosperity and glory of the state of New-York, enkindled the fire of emulation in other states, and reflected a lustre upon the names of all who were active in support of its adoption. In 1811 he was chosen lieutenant governor of New-York, and in 1812 he was nominated, and zealously supported by a portion of the people, as a candidate for the office of president of the United States. In 1817, he was elected, by an almost unanimous vote, to the elevated station of governor of the state of New-York, and, with the exception of a single term of two years, during which he declined a re-election, he continued to occupy that station with unrivalled dignity, utility, and splendor, actively and laboriously devoted to the faithful discharge of its arduous and responsible duties, till the hour of his sudden and melancholy exit. During his active life, he was a prominent and useful member, and often an

efficient officer, of many literary, scientific and benevolent institutions, of some of which he was the founder; and, in the several orders of masonry and knighthood, he filled, from time to time, all the most important and dignified stations.

Mr Clinton possessed a mind of the highest order—original, powerful and capacious—disciplined by habits of patient and laborious investigation and profound reflection. His conceptions were clear, rapid, and vigorous; and his judgment was sound and accurate. He, like WASHINGTON, was distinguished rather for solidity of understanding than for brilliancy of imagination—rather for practical good sense than for the lofty and excursive soarings of fancy. His examination of every subject presented to his notice, was thorough, critical, and severe. His opinions were maturely and deliberately formed, and his reasoning in their defence, if not always convincing, was at least forcible, logical and clear. His views were enlarged, liberal, and enlightened, his designs bold and extensive, and his plans for their execution practical and sagacious. He possessed, in an eminent degree, that courage of the cabinet which has been justly said to be no less rare, and often more important than that of the field, and uniformly evinced a fearless and persevering spirit, which no difficulties could discourage, no obstacles subdue. When convinced of the importance and practicability of an object, and once resolved upon its attainment, he marched boldly and resolutely forward, rather animated than depressed by difficulties, dangers and impediments. In the transaction of

business he was prompt, decisive and energetic. He was accurate and minute in his attention to details, and displayed no less facility and correctness in the execution of his plans, than originality and boldness in their conception.

As a politician, Mr Clinton was early connected with the great party in his native state, which had long borne the name of his family, and of which he afterwards became the rallying point and the head. How far his judgment was biassed and his opinions affected by the partialities and prejudices invariably connected with party feeling, it is perhaps impossible to decide. The peculiar relation in which he stood towards a great portion of the people, who had been closely attached to the principles and ^{fortunes}~~opinions~~ of his venerable uncle, and the zeal with which, in the heyday of youthful ardor, and under the influence of a natural and honorable family and personal attachment, he entered upon the defence of those principles and the support of those fortunes, were certainly eminently calculated to exercise a permanent influence over his political opinions and prospects. Yet, making due allowance for these peculiar circumstances, without undertaking to decide upon the merits of the controversies, which have long and violently agitated the state, between his friends and opponents, we may confidently assert, that, notwithstanding the powerful temptations by which he was surrounded, it could never be justly said of him, amidst all the collisions and conflicts of the day, that he

narrowed his mind,

And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.

On the contrary, he was fully aware of the important truth, and acted under that conviction, that, whatever temporary influence may be derived from mere party association, any reputation, thus acquired, must be ephemeral and local, and totally unworthy the effort of any man of high and honorable ambition. He sought therefore to build his fame upon a more substantial and durable foundation. He sunk the character of the politician in that of the statesman, and, while he labored for the promotion of his party and their cause, he labored still more intensely for the interests of his country and of mankind. By this course he secured, at once, immediate popularity and permanent renown. The one is attested by the remarkable fact, that, notwithstanding all the contests of party and the ever-varying results with which they are attended, he never failed of obtaining his election, whenever he was a candidate for any office in the gift of the people of New-York. The other is abundantly proved by the universal and spontaneous admission of all ranks and parties, and by the anxious solicitude with which his warmest political opponents now press forward to proclaim his pre-eminent usefulness and worth.

As a scholar, Mr Clinton occupied the most elevated ground. His reading was extensive, various, well-directed, and profitable. His ready and capacious memory enabled him to store up vast funds of learning, which were subservient to his call whenever required. Abstruse scientific investigations occupied a

portion of his time and aided the discipline of his mind, while classical and elegant literature constituted the amusement and delight of his leisure hours. His style, as a writer, was at once vigorous and rich—distinguished, like his mind, rather for solid thought than for brilliant imagery—preserving a happy medium between the inflated and the dull; sufficiently ornamented, yet dignified, perspicuous and strong. His executive messages to the legislature of New-York, unlike the great mass of similar productions, have been read with interest and profit far beyond the limits of the state for which they were designed, and have been, not merely useful as matters of form or as temporary state-papers, but worthy of preservation as valuable treasures of practical wisdom.

The zeal with which this great man employed the energies of his powerful mind, the weight of his personal popularity, and the influence of his official stations for the relief of human misery, and the general advancement of human happiness, will be remembered with gratitude and admiration, for a succession of ages after the political questions and parties of the day shall have been buried beneath the fathomless ocean of oblivion. His disinterested efforts in behalf of charitable institutions, in favor of an amelioration of the criminal code, for the promotion of the useful arts, and the encouragement of industry and talent, have not only produced, as their immediate effects, the improvements so much needed and desired, but, by their influence as examples to future statesmen, and by their

endency to excite a noble emulation in the glorious work of philanthropy, may be a prolific source of unnumbered and incalculable blessings throughout all future time. As a friend of science, an able advocate for the cause of education, and a liberal patron of seminaries of learning and other literary institutions, Mr Clinton has, also, left behind him a lasting and brilliant fame. But it is probably as the enlightened projector, and resolute, intrepid, and unconquerable friend and promoter of the great work of internal improvement, that he will be most extensively and permanently known. Without Clinton, or some one possessing the spirit of Clinton, the great canals of New-York would not have been constructed. Common minds could not realize the practicability, with the limited resources of a young nation like ours, of pouring the waters of the lakes, through an artificial channel, upwards of three hundred miles in length, over mountains and through valleys, into the great Atlantic. Men even of powerful intellects, enterprising, patriotic and bold, regarded as chimerical and absurd the project of transporting by water to the city of New-York the productions of the whole north-western country. But Clinton was not to be discouraged by the ridicule of his opponents or by the faint hopes and disheartening predictions of his friends. With a firmness of purpose almost unequalled—but which has been, not unaptly, compared to that of Columbus, on the broad and untried ocean, his needle no longer true to the pole and his whole crew heartless

and despondent—he maintained with unwavering confidence the practicability, no less than the importance, of the object, rallied the almost extinguished zeal of the few who were willing to remain with him to the last, encountered with unshaken fortitude the shafts of opposition, and, at length, obtained a splendid and triumphant victory—a victory, which left behind it no blood-stained field, but which extensively diffused wealth, prosperity and happiness even among the vanquished, while it has erected a noble and perennial monument to the genius, and firmness, and undaunted heroism of the illustrious conqueror.

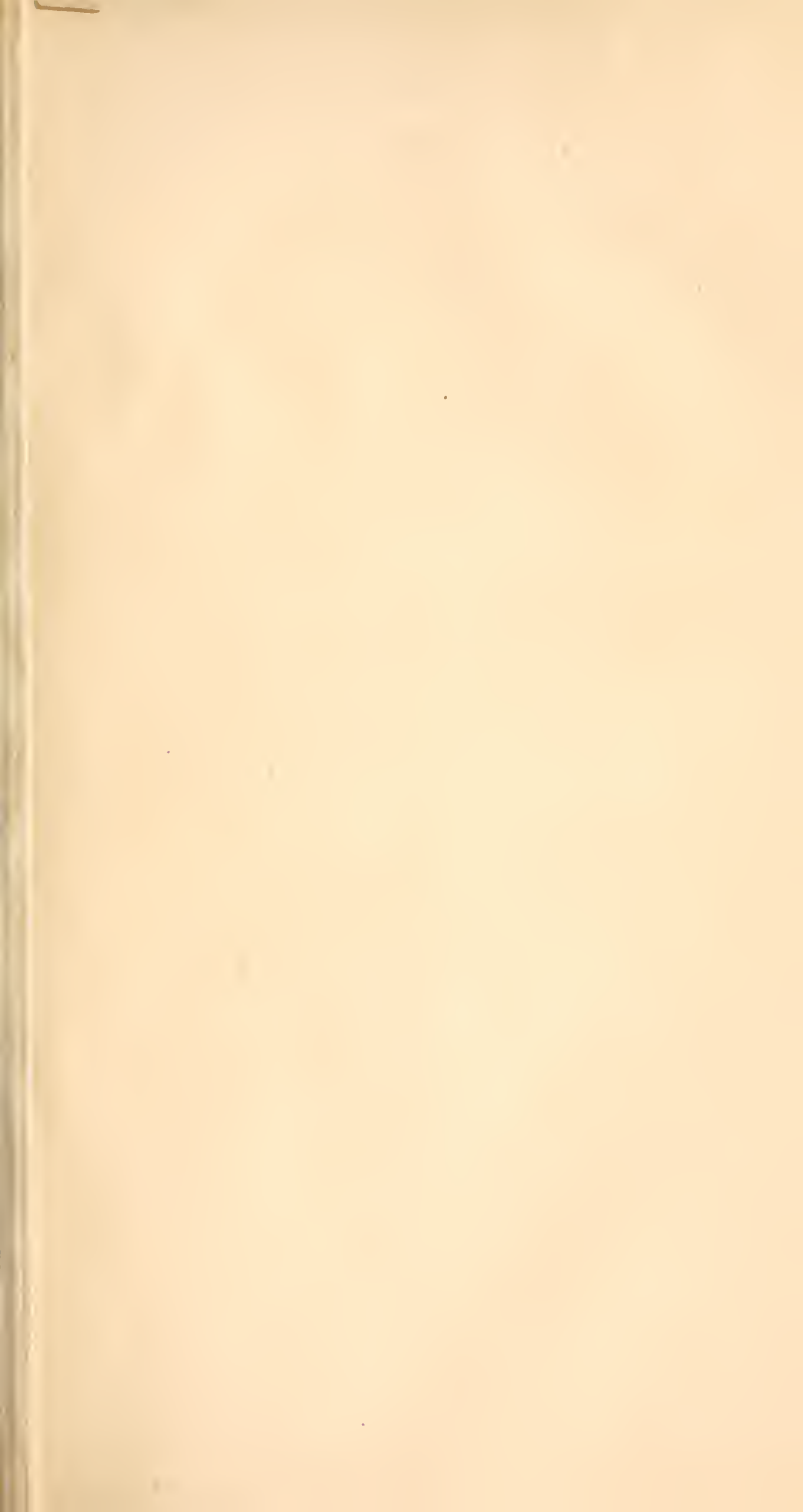
In the private relations of domestic life, in his intercourse with his friends, in his manners towards his fellow-citizens in the transaction of business and the exercise of courtesy, Mr Clinton was all that could be reasonably expected or desired—the kind husband, the fond parent, the ardent friend, the polished gentleman at once dignified and affable and easy of access, the liberal benefactor and the pious christian. His moral character was without a stain, and in religion he was tolerant, liberal and devout.

It remains only to speak of him in a relation peculiarly dear and interesting to us. De Witt Clinton was a genuine mason, and, as such, his memory is entitled to all the respect and veneration, which we, as a body, can bestow. He was initiated at an early age, and always maintained a warm and undeviating attachment to the order. He was never inclined to desert it, or to treat it with disrespect, on account of

temporary abuses or the occasional misconduct of some of its members. He was soon called to preside over Holland Lodge, of which he was a member, and delivered on the evening of his installation, in December, 1793, an address on the principles of our institution, abounding in all that good sense and that fine feeling, which so eminently characterized his subsequent writings. He afterwards successively occupied all the highest offices in the several masonic bodies with which he was connected in his native state, and for many years held, to the universal satisfaction of the fraternity, the dignified and important stations of presiding officer in the two highest masonic bodies in the union, having each a jurisdiction co-extensive with the federal republic—the General Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the United States, and the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templars and the appendant orders.

Such is a faint sketch of the life, character, and services of this illustrious man. And now, my companions, before I complete this feeble performance of the task you have assigned me, I am called upon to discharge another painful duty. Since the summons was issued, convening you as a body on the present occasion, intelligence has reached us, that one of the prominent individuals to whom it was addressed, had himself just departed to his eternal home. Yes, my companions, death has invaded our little circle, and EDWARD H. STEELE, who has so often united with us in our masonic labors, and constituted so important a link

in our chain of masonic sympathy and love, is unable to partake with us in the duties of this melancholy day. I cannot now dwell, in detail, on the many excellent traits which adorned his character. We all knew the intelligence of his mind, the polish of his manners, the warmth of his affections, and the virtues of his heart. He too is gone, and instead of coming here to day, as we had confidently hoped and expected, to join with us in a tribute of affectionate and cordial respect to the memory of the venerated Clinton, he has closely followed Clinton, through the outer courts of the tabernacle, to seek for an admission within the veil of the Grand Chapter above. It is worthy also of remark, and affords a striking and impressive memento of the frailty and uncertainty of every thing human, that Clinton had himself left unperformed a similar task. The eulogy designed for the lamented EMMETT is still unpronounced, and that tongue which was expected to have uttered it, is, by the dread fiat of omnipotence, silenced forever. That kindred spirit, which would so faithfully have told his worth and so justly appreciated his character, has taken its flight to the same mansions of glory. And now, sainted shades, as you look down from your blissful abodes upon the fleeting scenes of this transitory existence, how do you exult in the contemplation of the realities by which you are surrounded, and unite in the chorus of gratitude and joy, that at length you have found something durable and certain, upon which you may safely and confidently repose during the future progress of an interminable existence!





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